



BOUNDARIES

Toolkit

Better Boundaries

A boundary is a limit or a demarcation. Personal boundaries define your personal space. These are the physical and emotional boundaries that separate us from other people.

One such boundary is your personal space - that invisible boundary around your body. When a stranger gets too close to you, for example, you start to feel uncomfortable.

An emotional boundary is usually some sort of limit. We all have limits as to what feels appropriate and safe when it comes to how others treat us emotionally.

What may be fine to you may be unacceptable to someone else. Unless you don't let people know what your boundaries are, they may continue to violate them unknowingly.

A boundary violation is when someone crosses the physical or emotional limits set by another person. Regardless of whether they do it knowingly or unknowingly, it's a boundary violation.

You may have begun a relationship thinking that you will not tolerate certain behaviour from a partner. Example, you will not tolerate being cheated on or treated with disrespect.

But as the relationship progresses, you may find yourself tolerating boundary violations you swore you would never put up with.

Exercise: Establish Your Boundaries.

Take yourself through this exercise during your therapy session. You may also want to role-play situations where you have difficulty setting boundaries.

1. Make a list of the behaviors that bother you the most, that push your buttons and that are morally unacceptable to you. This is a highly individual list and what may constitute a boundary violation for one person may be perfectly acceptable behaviour for another. Your list may include things such as going through your phone, reading your journal, or disrespecting you in front of others. Example: You will not tolerate your partner making fun of you in front of other people.

2. Clearly communicate your boundaries. Now that you know what your boundaries and limits are, it's time to communicate them to other people.

You can choose to do so in one of two ways:

Option A

You can choose an appropriate time to sit down with the other person (your partner, friend, family member, co-worker) and tell them that you've been establishing better boundaries.

Tell them what your limits and boundaries are (as it relates to them) and ask them to honour them. You can also ask them to share their boundaries with you.

If it feels too formal and too scary for you, then you may choose the second approach.

Option B

Stand up for your limits and boundaries on a case-by-case basis. Boundary violations can be resolved in the moment if you gently tell the other person about them, and they apologise and assure you that it will never happen again.

This doesn't always happen though. The other person may get defensive and deny that they violated your boundaries. Don't let this stop you though. Sometimes the person may deny it in the moment, but, after thinking it over, decide to honour your boundaries going forward.

Learning To Say No

Learning to say "no" is one of the most vital skills you need to develop when learning to set healthy boundaries.

If you cannot say no when you need to, you risk exploitation, a loss of self-respect, the respect of others, and perhaps even your safety.

Practice Saying No

Start out by practicing saying the word no. Say no out loud when you are by yourself. Say it silently to yourself when you find yourself in a situation where you would like to say no, but you're afraid to. If you continue practicing and reminding yourself that you have the right to say no, you'll eventually gain the courage and confidence to speak it out loud.

Here are some sample dialogues to help you to become more comfortable with saying no:

Situation: Someone tries to pressure you into doing something.

Suggested response: "I'm not comfortable with that" or "No, I don't want to do that."

Situation: Someone has made plans for you without checking with you first

Suggested Response: That doesn't work for me. I'm sorry. We'll have to work something else out.

If the person continues to pressure you, you can respond with: "I need you to hear me. I don't want to do that."

You may want to role-play different situations where you have difficulty setting boundaries. This will make it much easier when you have to actually set and enforce them in real life.

